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## THE DIFFICULTIES AND DANGERS CONFRONTING THE WORKING WOMAN

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I hope I shall not be charged with heresy to the working woman when I say that I believe the greatest dangers and difficulties which confront her to-day in her struggle for industrial equality with man are to a great extent inherent in herself. I believe them to be not so much of an economic or social nature as they are physiologic and temperamental limitations fixed by sex.

So long as women continue to be the child-bearers of the race—either in fact or in potentiality—will they be confronted by conditions which present graver dangers and difficulties than those which come to the lives of workingmen.

The conditions that confront men in factory, in workshop, store and office are, it must be admitted, bad enough. How infinitely worse then are they for women, with their more delicate and complicated nervous organizations? An environment in which man may labor equably for indefinite time will induce in the woman hysteria, disease and ultimate physical and nervous collapse.

The same thing applies to her food and lodgings. A healthy, hard-working man demands certain elements of food day by day, and if they are supplied him, however coarse or unsavory they be, he goes on ordinarily with a well-nurtured body. Not so the woman. Call her finicky if you like, but in reality her constitutional sex difference makes it impossible for her to regularly stoke the human furnace with food fuel. Not one hard-working woman in a thousand is devoid of an abnormal appetite. A day off food with a day of toil, and she has begun the erratic course of working girl dietetics which leads to her ultimate destruction as a useful unit in the field of economic industry.

Another dire distress which is the portion of every working woman lies in the fact that, dollar for dollar and penny for penny, it is much harder for her to live upon her wages than it is for the

man. Especially is this true in the large cities, where the homeless working woman has no hotel or lodging house which provides cheap shelter and food for her.

The workingman's hotel and the workingman's lodging house have long been established institutions. Men, if they must, can live to-day upon very meagre salaries. By the aid of such institutions as the Mills Hotels and the municipal lodging houses men can find decent shelter for the night; they can get a hot dinner and a good breakfast for a very small sum of money. But women in similar situations as regards income cannot do so. There is no provision whereby a girl laboring faithfully from eight to ten hours per day can live honestly upon a wage of less than \$5 a week. This sum will readily keep a single man in food, shelter and clothing. And because of this stern, uncompromising fact, the average young working woman in our great cities must perpetually face a danger of the gravest social, as well as moral, import.

It is almost impossible for a large class of women wage earners to be healthy, and when I say healthy, I refer quite as much to the mental as to the bodily health. Working women do not have good health—that is, they do not have the best of health. All things else being equal, the wage-earning woman compares unfavorably in this respect with either the society woman or the woman whose activities are confined to the household. The working woman must conform not only more or less to bad sanitary and hygienic conditions in her place of employment, but she always lives from necessity in the least desirable quarters of her city or town. In proportion to men, she pays more for the actual necessities of life than men.

As I have pointed out in my book, working women's hotels might do much to remove many of the more sordid temptations which surround the toiler of the cheerless life. But she—a woman ever—would live in no institution in which there was not a man. She must be allowed to entertain her men friends at home or she will do so somewhere else.

While it may seem harsh and is warranted to bring down upon me a chattering of disapproval, I must say that, as I have seen the working woman, her most fundamental difficulty lies in her inability and unfitness for sustained effort, as compared with her male competitors. Woman is not capable of doing well much of the labor she has essayed. She does not know how to work as men know how

to work. She has not been trained in the past. She has no inherited aptitude for doing things with a view to economic ends. She has not the faintest conception of the general rudimentary principles of intelligent labor, of conscious and carefully co-ordinated effort. And until we have learned to be intelligent workers, capable of sustained effort, we are going to confront perpetually that greatest of difficulties—the wage problem and its attendant complications.

That they can or ever will develop equal industrial abilities I doubt much, for the very reason I have pointed out earlier, that as potential mothers they are functionally limited mentally and physically.

I see no such danger for the male worker. In spite of all the pother we have made over it, in the face of all the fuss and worry that has been created because several million or so of us women have chosen or been forced by economic circumstances to invade man's industrial domain, the fact remains that the work of the world is being done to-day, as it has always been done, by men. Man is doing to-day not only all the work he has been accustomed to doing in the past, but he has even invaded woman's special sphere of activity, or that sphere which tradition has imputed to feminine talent and skill. It is a significant fact that men, not women, are our best milliners, our best dressmakers, our best ladies' tailors, our best hairdressers, our best cooks. It is a significant fact that none of us will employ women to do these things for us where it is possible to get the services of a man. Take, for instance, the exceedingly feminine employments of millinery and hairdressing. Men design our hats, and none but a man can perform the rites of a Marcel wave satisfactorily. In a number of the best New York hairdressing establishments women operatives have been dispensed with entirely, because they cannot do such good work as the average man hairdresser. And who ever heard of a woman chef?